

**STATEMENT OF P. DANIEL SMITH, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS CONCERNING H.R. 3815, TO REQUIRE THE NATONAL PARK SERVICE TO UNDERTAKE A STUDY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE IN HOPE, ARKANSAS.**

**June 6, 2002**

---

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 3815, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the suitability and feasibility of establishing a Presidential National Historic Site, in Hope, Arkansas, and for other purposes.

The Department supports H.R. 3815, with a technical amendment noted at the end of this testimony. However, the Department did not request additional funding for this study in Fiscal Year 2003. We believe that any funding requested should be directed towards completing previously authorized studies. Presently, there are 37 studies pending, of which we hope to transmit at least 7 to Congress by the end of 2002. To meet the President's Initiative to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog, we must continue to focus our resources on caring for existing areas in the National Park System. Thus, we have concerns about new funding requirements for a new park unit that could be required if the study recommends designation while the Department is trying to eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog. As such, the Department will identify in each study all acquisition, one-time, and operational costs of the proposed site. At this time, these costs are unknown.

H.R. 3815 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to carry out a study on the suitability and feasibility of designating the William Jefferson Clinton birthplace home located in Hope, Arkansas, as a national historic site. Hope, Arkansas, is the location of the boyhood home of William Jefferson Clinton, the 42<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States. Located between Dallas and Memphis, this southern community is part of the Texarkana greater metropolitan area. Built in 1917, the house in Hope, where President Clinton spent his first four years with his maternal grandparents, is now owned by the Clinton Birthplace Foundation.

This non-profit 501(c)(3) organization was established to help preserve this presidential site.

In 1998, Congress passed Public Law 105-391, the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998, which requires congressional authorization of areas to be studied for potential new units of the National Park System. The law also designates the criteria to be followed by the National Park Service in determining whether to recommend an area as a unit of the National Park System. This study will determine whether it conforms to the criteria of Public Law 105-391.

With respect to historic sites, the studies do not only look at whether the event or person associated with the site was historically significant. They look at the integrity of the buildings, and other factors, such as whether there are other sites that might more appropriately tell the story associated with a particular site.

The National Park System consists of many previous residences of former presidents. However, there are also many residences of former presidents that are not part of the system. A study would look at whether the Federal Government is the most appropriate entity to manage the site and would help identify other protection and preservation methods available. When sites are managed by other entities, such as state governments or private foundations, the National Park Service may assist these entities in achieving the common goal of protecting and interpreting these important places for all Americans. Conducting a study allows Congress to be certain it is protecting an area that meets the criteria to be designated a unit of the National Park System and that the National Park Service is the best agency to manage the site.

A study also would enable the National Park Service and Congress to identify the costs in acquiring, restoring, and operating a potential site. Such a review is important if we are to gain control of the deferred maintenance backlog and eliminate it within five years, as the President's Initiative seeks to do.

We recommend a technical amendment to include a missing word. On page 2, line 15, insert "the" after "to".

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.